DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 223 311 JC 820 563

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|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Walton, Barbara J., Ed. |
| TITLE | The College for Human Services: An Applied Transdisciplinary Curriculum. |
| INSTITUTION | College for Human Services, New York, N. Y. |
| PUB DATE | May 82 |
| NOTE | 24p. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | College for Human Services, 345 Hudson Street, New York, NY (Free). |
| PUB TYPE | Viewpoints (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS. |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Curriculum Design; Educational Innovation; Educational Principles; Financial Support; Higher Education; Humanistic Education; *Human Services; *Institutional Characteristics; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Low Income Groups; Nontraditional Students; *Professional Education; *Values Education |

ABSTRACT

The College for Human Services was created in 1964 to educate human service workers within the framework of an institutional commitment to social justice and social change, belief in a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to learning, and the aspiration to legitimate human services as a professional field. The college's program is organized around eight requisite performance areas: self-assessment and preparation for practice, establishing professional relationships, working with others, helping others learn, counseling, community liaison, supervision, and managing change. Each area is examined in terms of five dimensions of effective performance: goals, values, self and others, systems, and skills. Classroom study is integrated with analysis of issues arising from work experiences. The majority of the college's students have been from low-income, minority populations, and almost half lacked high school diplomas upon enrollment. Financial support originally came from the federal government and later from local government, foundation grants, and tuition. The college differs from other schools in: (1) its commitment to the solution of social problems and the transformation of individuals and institutions; (2) its transdisciplinary performance-based curriculum; (3) its explicit examination of values and their relationship to effective human service work; (4) the organization of disciplines around performance areas; and (5) the ongoing interplay of theoretical and practical issues. (HB)

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# The College For Human Services: An Applied Transdisciplinary Curriculum

Edited by
Barbara J. Walton

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MAY 1982

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The College gratefully acknowledges support from the Ford Foundation for the preparation of the report on which this analysis is based. The original report has been condensed and edited substantially by Barbara J. Walton. Sections presented here deal with the history, basic assumptions and curriculum of the College and how these differ from those of other institutions of higher education.

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## FOREWORD

Certain aspects of the College's complex program are not covered in this report. I will describe these briefly here, and comment on some implications of the College's program as a whole.

The College has a broad purpose or mission that goes beyond the education of human service workers. This mission involves the creation of a more just society for everyone. Through the improvement of human service the College seeks to move society toward greater equity as well as greater equality.

It aims to achieve a fairer distribution of services, one that in some measure redresses the imbalance between citizens. To do this requires a change in institutions. Social justice will become a reality only when institutions reflect the needs of all citizens and all citizens have a voice in determining institutional goals. The College has not flinched from the broad purpose of its founder, Audrey C. Cohen, despite the countervailing trends which are so evident today. It remains a model of "telic reform," as Grant and Riesman labeled it in "The Perpetual Dream," a book about experiment and reform in American colleges. The College does not intend to give up its dream, however visionary it may appear to be in the eighties.

It is rare today for an institution of higher education to have this sense of social mission. One educational thinker who might have understood was John Dewey, who did for elementary education what the College is doing for postsecondary. Dewey explicitly recognized the connection between education and democracy and consciously developed a model of elementary and secondary education that would prepare children to live in the democratic society he envisioned. Like the College, he started by asking about outcomes: what kind of citizen did a democracy require. Did it require cooperation? Then cooperation rather than competition must pervade the classroom. Did it require respect for the opinions of others? Then respect must be shown and taught in the classroom. Participation in government? Then classroom organization must allow students to govern themselves. Was problem-solving important? Then creative problem-solving must be a part of a student's experience. The College started with basic questions about the desired outcomes of human service practice and developed a program which would achieve these outcomes. This process was central to the development of the curriculum and is reflected in the program presented here.

A second aspect of the College's program, not in the text which follows, is the invention of an holistic instrument to assess student learning and performance called a "constructive action." Used as a tool for social change, the constructive action is a "discrete piece of service to a client or agency in which theory is related to practice and the citizen or community is empowered." Empowerment is the ultimate service goal, in the sense of enabling people to manage their lives, meet their needs and fulfill their potential as creative and productive members of society. The College's faith in people is revealed in this goal. The basic value underlying it, like that of human service in general, is respect for persons and a belief that people as individuals and in groups are capable of changing themselves and causing change in society. This implies a commitment to the idea that human beings are free, not determined, and that they can "create" themselves and their environment. Also revealed is the College's commitment to a holistic view of human beings. It perceives people as "whole persons," not just a mass of drives, needs and reflexes as reductionist schools of psychology maintain. It believes they are more than the sum of their specialized functions or anatomical parts. Rather people are complex systems whose behavior cannot be neatly predicted, pigeonholed or given a label.

The constructive action as an assessment tool is now being tested in the field under a federal research grant. The purpose is to create a scale which will show whether and to what extent specified goals set by practitioner and citizen collaboratively are achieved. Specific instruments have been developed and ways of measuring the degree of goal attainment in crucial areas are being devised. If standards of quality as well as quantity can be established, the College belives this will make an important contribution to the definition and measurement of productivity in the service sector.

What makes the constructive action special and different from other kinds of projects is its holistic character. It requires the integration of theory and practice, of thought and action. It seeks to bridge the gap that has separated mind and body since the time of Plato. The notion that learning can be separated from action, that theory comes first and application of theory later, is foreign to the College. It asks students to apply what they have learned immediately in their jobs and to analyze the results. If this leads to revision or refinement of facts and ideas, so much the better. In this process, job

performance assumes an equal role with classroom performance and actual experience is respected as a source of knowledge along with knowledge from books. In evaluating constructive actions the standards are both technical and humanistic. They refer to both process and product. The dimensions of human service performance described here provide the framework for looking at a constructive action and the questions asked in each performance area circumscribe the desired outcome. This outcome (citizen empowerment) is evaluated not only by faculty, supervisors and students but, more importantly, by citizen/clients. The College would be the first to admit that this model is a complex one to implement and that it requires a dedicated faculty and adequate resources.

Educational psychology confirms the soundness of this approach. Facts and concepts are more readily learned when they emerge from and are related to action. Knowledge contained in books, those "dry deposits from the past" as Dewey called them, is most successfully absorbed when it is related to the experience of the learner and to action the learner must take. In the process of human development, learning to **do** things comes first. Only at a later stage do children begin giving names to things and to think in abstractions. Without the experience of action which strengthens the connection to oneself, knowledge remains irrelevant, not something vital and meaningful to be integrated into the living structure of thinking and problem-solving. "Recognition of the natural course of development," wrote Dewey in his classic statement on children's learning, "always sets out with situations which involve learning by doing." The College believes that in adult education the interaction of learning and doing must fuse into a whole that represents optimal performance.

A third important aspect of the College's program, treated more fully in this report is the interdisciplinary — or more accurately, transdisciplinary — nature of the curriculum. The College sees all of knowledge as potentially relevant to human service. Thus the curriculum draws on knowledge from many disciplines, rejecting the intense specialization that has overtaken most professional fields. The report which follows shows what can be done when faculty members are willing to pool their expertise and come up with a whole new curriculum in which facts and theories from many sources are related to function and performance. While the social sciences predominate, the humanities also play an important role in

the curriculum. Concepts from literature, philosophy and history are essential to an understanding of the human condition. The value questions raised by the humanities, both implicitly and explicitly, are as old as humankind and as important today as in the past. In human service especially value questions must be identified, discussed and clarified. To discuss the Good, the True and the Beautiful may seem quaint, but when students move on to examine such philosophical concepts as altruism or the greatest good of the greatest number, they quickly see a relationship to what they are doing. The way in which the College has integrated humanities concepts into the curriculum bears closer examination. It can be argued that it has created a core curriculum which is related to vocation but incorporates the liberal arts, a feat which eludes many of our most prestigious institutions.

Finally the College is taking the leadership in legitimizing human service as a professional field. Despite the disfavor with which human service is now viewed in Washington, where the official positions seems to be that human service workers provide a service no one is asking for and hardly anyone needs, the College is quietly proceeding to establish the American Council for Human Service. This new professional organization will promote the long-term goal of citizen empowerment through an active membership campaign and through emphasis on self-assessment. It is too soon to say what the results of this ambitious venture will be during a decade which has started with the dismantling of so many social programs but at least the Council will keep alive the concept of service at a time when human values seems all but forgotten.

Barbara J. Walton, Editor

## BRIEF HISTORY OF THE COLLEGE

The College for Human Services was founded by Audrey C. Cohen in 1964 as the Women's Talent Corps. It was dedicated to creating jobs for talented low-income women and providing the training and experience they needed to obtain these and other jobs in the human services. Creating paraprofessional positions in education, law, guidance, and other fields, the College grew from an experimental program with a budget of $300,000 to a professional program with a budget of almost three million dollars. Although it was conceived during a period of idealism and social activism in the sixties, it has persisted into the eighties, which many programs begun in those heady and turbulent days have not. The College is still pursuing its original goals, but it has long since broadened its scope, enrolling men as well as women, developing a professional-level education and training program, and actively pursuing the development of a new Human Service profession. It is now accredited to operate a Bachelor's degree program in three states, and claims among its enthusiastic supporters many educators, community leaders, and government officials. It is an institution consciously dedicated not only to humanpower training but to social justice and social change through improved professional education and human service delivery in this country.

### The Program

The College conducts a single, professional-level program designed to provide education, work experience and career development to low-income adults. It has recently added a tuition program open to all students regardless of income level. Students attend 12-16 hours per week of classes, either during the day if they can arrange to be released from their jobs, or evenings and weekends. Classes at the College organize academic materials from the social sciences and humanities around eight basic performance areas considered necessary for all human service work. These are Self Assessment and Preparation for Practice; Establishing Professional Relationships; Working with Others in Groups; Helping Others Learn; Counseling; Community Liaison; Supervison; Managing Change. One performance area (called a "Crystal") is studied at a time. Within each Crystal classes are divided into five Dimensions of Effective Performance. These are: Goals; Values; Self and Others; Systems; and Skills. In addition, all students attend a Crystal

Seminar, designed to integrate learning from the Dimensions, as each focuses on the performance area being studied at the time.

A "field focus" class is held each week in which problems and issues arising in a student's work-experience are discussed and related to theoretical material. The way in which theories help in understanding one's experience is considered to be as important as the content of the theories themselves. A field curriculum occupying about three hours per week is negotiated with work-supervisors at individual work places. Each agency is asked to ensure that each student receives a solid orientation to the job, specific information about the agency and its clients, inclusion in agency staff meetings as a regular participant, and special training in particular skills related to the function of the agency. Moreover, the College's full-time faculty, called "Coordinator-Teachers," spends several days each week visiting students at their worksites, talking with supervisors and helping students resolve problems which arise.

Assessment of students is performance-based, and blends theory with practice. In addition to attending classes and completing written assignments, each student during each Crystal must plan, perform, analyze, and document a Constructive Action conducted with a specific citizen or group of citizens. This Constructive Action must attempt to solve a problem currently experienced by the citizen-client, must be worked out with the citizen-client's cooperation, and must be evaluated at several stages by the student's Coordinator-Teacher, the work supervisor, and the citizen or group being assisted. The written analysis must show the student's grasp of theories studied in relation to the problem and solution. Moreover, it must show that the student has helped the citizen-client, not just to solve the particular problem at hand, but to become more "empowered" in general — more self-sufficient, less dependent on service systems, more able to control and manage his or her own life. An assessment of student performance is made by clients as well as by supervisors and Coordinator-Teachers.

**The Students**

Students at the College for Human Services have traditionally been low-income adults. Over the years, some two-thirds have been Black and about one-sixth have been Hispanic. The rest have been Native Americans, Asian

Americans, and Caucasians. About two-thirds have been women, and large majorities have been sole heads of household with one to five children. Almost half lacked high school diplomas when they enrolled in the College and at least half have received public assistance at some time.

The College requires appicants to show that they have the reading, writing, and arithmetic skills necessary for work at a beginning college level as measured by a standardized test and a personal essay. Ability and motivation to seek a career which involves helping others are assessed on the basis of group interviews and written evidence of past "helping" experience as a family member, community participant, or human service worker. Each applicant must also have either a current human service job or must be accepted into a subsidized work-placement at a human services agency as arranged by the College staff.

The student body of the College has recently been small, numbering fewer than 200 annually at the New York campus, and 50 or fewer at each of the newer branches. This has now changed and the number of students may increase to as many as 600. More than 1200 low-income adults have attended the College since the program was established. Of these, 900 have completed at least one year of the program, and 350 have received academic degrees from the College. More than 100 have earned the recently accredited Bachelor of Professional Studies. A large number of College alumni now work in more than 400 human service agencies in the New York City area, and the New York branch sometimes receives 2,000 applications for the small number of student places available annually.

**Financial Support**

Financial support for the College originally came primarily from the Federal government. Early grants from the Johnson-era Office of Economic Opportunity and the Department of Labor were supplanted in 1973 by yearly contracts with the City of New York (or in Florida and California with local and state agencies) which distributed Federal funds under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). Such contracts covered wages and training allowances for students as well as operating expenses of the College. Special grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the U.S. Office of Education, and other Federal agencies helped the College enrich its curriculum, expand its student services, and develop its institutional

base. Planning and development grants from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPE) and the Strengthening Developing Institutions Program (SDIP) made possible the creation of branches replicating the College's New York program, and the improvement of its organizational processes. Currently a three-year grant from the National Institute of Mental Health supports an ongoing research project designed to test processes for increasing the productivity of human service workers. Small grants from local foundations and corporations provide uncommitted funds not designated for specific purposes, and in 1980 for the first time the College established a tuition charge which has given it a stronger, more diversified financial base.

## HOW THE COLLEGE DIFFERS FROM OTHER INSTITUTIONS

### Commitment to Social Change

The mission of the College for Human Services is stated with unusual precision for an institution of higher education. President Audrey Cohen points out that the College is one of the few educatioanl institutions, if indeed there are any others — which has among its stated aims the encouragement of social change.[1] This is probably true in a literal sense. Most colleges and universities phrase their goals in extremely broad terms. Moreover, the terms used generally do not explicitly commit the institution to changing society in the present, even though most institutions believe that they are important engines of social change in the long run. They mean social change that is gradual, in a sense "non-political"; it is expected to emerge over time as their graduates put their education to use and become the leaders of the future. At the College for Human Services this is not enough. It sees the need for social justice as urgent, requiring action now if our system is to survive. It assumes that sufficient information is available to identify social problems and to do something about them.

[1]For a full discussion of the College's social change mission see: Audrey C. Cohen. The Citizen as **the Integrating Agent: Productivity in the Human Services,** published by HEW as part of its Project Share Monograph Series in September 1978. A basic purpose of the College is to bring about social change through citizen empowerment, defined by the College as "the ability of people to manage their lives to recognize and meet their needs, and to fulfill their potential as creative, responsible and productive members of society to the extent compatible with the empowerment of others." Students learn to empower themselves and others by performing a series of Constructive Actions. This is a discreet piece of service to a client or agency in which theory is related to practice and the citizen or community is empowered. Students are evaluated on the basis of documented Constructive Actions in each of the eight performance areas described in this report. Success is measured in terms of the five dimensions. The net result is an improvement in the quality of service rendered and ultimately an increase in real productivity.

What is missing is the vision and the will to act. Audrey Cohen has such a vision, and holds to it without apology. It is a vision of education for service to humankind.

The educational program of the College clearly reflects this philosophy. Its service-oriented transdisciplinary program organized around ability to perform, its interplay of theory and practice, and its historic commitment to a student population left out of the educational mainstream, all support its claim to be a unique force for change among educational institutions.

**A Transdisciplinary Performance-Based Curriculum**

Most colleges have little that properly goes by the name of a curriculum — usually a few distribution requirements and a range of specialties among which students may choose. This is largely true, also, in professional schools. The most important thing about the College's curriculum is its complex, highly interrelated structure, explicitly designed for a new profession of the human services.

As described earlier the curriculum is made up of eight performance areas, each studied in a single, unified learning unit or "Crystal." Within each Crystal the five "dimensions of effective performance" are used as the focus of readings and theoretical discussion. As each performance area is taken up, student and faculty consider the relation of these five dimensions to that performance area and to the student's work in the field. Students take classes in each dimension weekly. These are integrative sessions in which relations among the five dimensions are discussed and their relation to the current Crystal is clarified. In addition, each week, students take special skills-training classes as needed in Professional Writing and in Mathematics for the Human Services. Each of these special classes is keyed to the kinds of problems that students are likely to encounter in their daily work as human service professionals-in-training.

For example, if students are studying the performance area on Establishing Effective Professional Relationships, each dimension class will cast light on this topic from a different direction. The Values seminar will discuss the distinctive values of professional work; the typical value-differences that arise among professionals, other workers, and clients in a human service agency; how relationships must be built if such differences are to be productive, not destructive; what special values are implied in the College's commitments to citizen-client empowerment, and so on. The Self and Others seminar

might consider interpersonal dynamics of professional relationships from psychological and sociological perspectives; differences between professional relationships and those of the family; the importance of class, cultural and ethnic differences among professionals and clients, the social meaning of a profession, and its impact on people and the services they need and receive. In the Systems seminar the emphasis might be placed on work-places as formal organizations; on the interplay of bureaucratic and professional authority in modern human service agencies; on the different kinds of relationships that a professional may expect to have with persons differently placed in the structure of a service system; on connections between workplace relationships and those of the larger society. The Skills seminar might focus on those skills needed in establishing relationships at the workplace; interviewing, observing and understanding behavior in new settings; learning role-expectations for oneself and others; perceiving incipient conflicts and working them out with others; presenting oneself to clients and eliciting their trust; reporting to colleagues and supervisors about client problems. The Purposes seminar might consider the purposes served by establishing professional relationships; how one's own purposes may be achieved in and through such relationships; what it means to pursue one's own purposes while co-workers and clients are pursuing their own; how individual and organizational purposes tend to conflict and are accommodated.

The Purpose seminar also serves as the student's Field Focus class, in which explicit use is made of issues arising in student work-experience to illustrate applications of theories studied, and to help students resolve the typical problems which face them as they build their work-relationships in a new job-setting. At the same time, the Professional Writing class may be helping students learn the form and professional terms used in staff reports on clients' problems, or in similar writing tasks imposed by human service work. The Math class may help students to understand and use basic, descriptive statistics for staff reports on client services or the processes of budget-making which have strong impact on professional relationships and service patterns within a service agency. Finally, the Crystal Seminar emphasizes the overview and interconnections of these parts, asking: What is a professional? A professional relationship? Why are such relationships important? How are they affected by each

dimension of performance in human service?

Planning of Dimension classes and of Crystal Seminars is usually done cooperatively by several Coordinator-Teachers. One teacher takes responsibility for drafting a preliminary plan, including a reading list, after which the plan is discussed critically and perhaps modified. Thus more than one person is typically involved in deciding the specific content of a class or seminar as well as its relation to other seminars, with the object of producing a manageable, mutually reinforcing set of learning tasks for the student. This degree of coherence in an undergraduate curriculum is extremely rare in American higher education. The exceptions merely prove the point: St. John's College in Annapolis; the old Hutchins College at the University of Chicago; the Columbia University education curriculum; the Montieth College curriculum at Wayne State University; Shimer College, which adopted the Chicago curriculum virtually unchanged — these and a few others are the outstanding attempts in U.S. educational history to create and sustain highly structured, purposive, and coherent curricula. Each made its own demands on faculty members for cooperation, coordination of efforts, and acceptance of a common framework for teaching.

The uniqueness of the curriculum springs, first of all, from its intellectual structure and coherence. Not as beads on a string, each alike or ambiguously following the last, but as differentiated parts in an interlocking complex, the courses and learning tasks of such a curriculum can each be seen to add their distinctive element to the whole and to serve a common learning objective. Teachers can explicate, in a logically tight and esthetically pleasing way, the separate truths involved and their relationships to each other. Sometimes during a Crystal seminar, students perceive interconnections in their own experience as a result of discussing an issue or performance area from several, coherently related, points of view. In doing so, they also understand something broader about the meaning of analysis and synthesis, about the place of intellectual structures and processes in making sense of one's life. Within its specific focus on the performance area needed for productive human service work, the College has opted for the advantages and difficulties of such a curriculum as a central feature of the institution and its "model."

The process of conceiving and refining this curriculum into its present form, consisting of eight performance areas and five dimensions of performance, has been written about

elsewhere. It involved both (1) systematic research on the competencies needed by successful human service professionals, conducted in cooperation with a well-known consulting firm in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and (2) a long series of collective discussions and working papers by members of the College faculty and staff. The staff group identified the kinds of "competencies" needed in human service, and structured a curriculum that could provide these to low-income adults. The consultant research confirmed staff conclusions. Thus, the creation of a complex, interlocking teaching/learning structure was largely the product of careful thought, constant reformulation, and cooperative discussion. This is a time-honored process, the very basis of all intellectual discourse. It implies that reasonable persons can start with different views, attack a common conceptual problem, and by persevering come up with a solution which satisfies all parties to a substantial degree. This is a remarkable accomplishment simply because it is so infrequently achieved—or even seriously attempted—at most institutions of higher learning. Far more common is a decentralized approach. Each academic department decides basic "requirements" to be imposed on students, and the aggregation of these requirements becomes a minimally coherent, almost purely additive whole that is called a curriculum only by the most generous of definitions. In this context, the College's development of a unified, essentially coherent curriculum — and the survival of that curriculum in substantially original form through a decade or more of use—is one of its most remarkable and distinctive attributes.

Such logical structure in a curriculum model, of course, has its costs. Some Coordinator-Teachers find that it restricts their freedom to teach. Accustomed to the disciplinary specialization of the usual university department, they believe the prescribed focus and sequence of the College's curriculum is too binding, and some argue that it is destructive of their "creativity" in responding to student needs and interests. Such teachers find it almost impossible to bring their proposed teaching plan to the weekly faculty planning sessions and have them criticized in a collegial way by their fellow team members. New teachers sometimes leave the College after a few months because of such problems. Others who reacted negatively at the start, have discovered that the team process can be educative and useful to them as well as their students.

**Explicit Inclusion of Values**

An important characteristic of the College's curriculum which also marks a sharp departure from traditional practice even in professional schools, is its explicit inclusion of the study of values. Thus, the Values Dimension is seen as one aspect of all effective performance in human service. Since all persons have values, since these differ between individuals and cultural groups, and since these differences have an important influence on all attempts to provide human service, the College reasons, all students preparing for professional work in this field should learn to deal with the value dimension of their work openly and intelligently. By contrast, most college curricula in this country follow the "value-neutral" posture of the scholarly and scientific disciplines. Since it is held as an article of faith by most modern scholars that values cannot be reliably identified and taught, and since academic disciplines are held to teach what is true, there is no place in the academic curriculum for courses on values. Values may be studied as part of the anthropological and sociological study of cultures but such courses typically consider them only as data to be examined for causal connections, as elements in natural sciences are studied. Students are not asked to consider the content of their own values, or the nature of ethical decisions, or their own methods of dealing with value-conflicts in action situations. But all of these may come up in class at the College for Human Service, and without apology.

Surprisingly to those accustomed to the value-free stance of conventional colleges, few students complain about the Values Dimension. Students do not, for the most part, feel that they have to accept a certain set of values, or that their own values are inadequate, or that one set of values is the true one. This innovative element in the curriculum seems to be accepted. But its importance should not for that reason be overlooked. It is a strong move away from the detached posture of the academic disciplines which engendered so much student-faculty conflict during the 1960's. Many students and some faculty members argued then that all patterns of human activity, and especially the professions with their implicit norms, affirmed some values (e.g., the worth of helping others, the acceptability of getting paid for it, etc.), and denied others (e.g., the right of non-Western-trained people to hold themselves out as healers). These controversies, so vigorous at the time, appear to have abated without producing a significant impact on most college and

university curricula. If academics now concede that values underlie most human activities, they have not generally changed what they teach for that reason. Most students, in consequence, continue to deal with value questions without the informed analysis or empirical data of their mentors. Exceptions include those health science programs which today offer or require "bioethics" courses. Such courses have taken strength from a rapidly growing awareness of the many ethical problems settled without thought by physicians and others who handle life-and-death decisions for their patients, using the powerful tools of science and technology. In sum, the College for Human Services is an active leader in the trend toward open and careful discussion of value issues in the professions, and this fact marks another major innovation of its curricular plan.

**Disciplines Organized Around Performance Areas**

From the foregoing it is evident that the College for Human Services is among the institutions which have taken the boldest steps in reorienting curriculum and materials away from the traditional academic disciplines and toward a new basis in performance areas needed for human service work. These areas cut across the traditional disciplines. The Dimensions of Effective Performance, which constitute the main sub-structure of instruction, are also not strictly bound by the usual breakdown of subject-matter into fields of scholarly inquiry. Instead, the College's curriculum is based on the question of what abilities one needs to do the work of helping others at a professional level. It proceeds on the same plane to break each such ability into the aspects of good work that must be considered in acquiring it.

The traditional disciplines, it should be recalled, are nowhere written in the mind of God. The scholarly divisions characteristic of American and European universities, with some variations, are derived from the divisions of the faculty of philosophy in the medieval university, which itself came largely from Aristotle's breakdown of philosophic inquiry into separate parts. It is quite possible that another great mind might have subdivided Western thought into other categories entirely, and that we would now regard these categories as inviolate. Thus, curriculum innovators who dare to propose "interdisciplinary" schemes of organizing learning can hardly be criticized because there is only one "true" division of knowlege or knowing into useful parts. A new, creative formulation of a curriculum may hope to grasp, just as

Aristotle did, some essential structure, some harmony of parts and whole, that proves useful and supportive to the kind of learning that is the purpose of the curriculum.

This is the essential thing about the College's curriculum. It is very simply and deliberately organized around the learning and teaching purposes. Thus, a division into "sociology" and "psychology" — themselves very recent additions to the academic lexicon — may serve better the purposes of advanced research, which requires collaboration among highly specialized scholars at many universities. But there is no reason to believe that those disciplines are necessarily the most productive starting places for teaching or learning about how to help others as a working professional.

There are many, in fact, who believe that interdisciplinary study, **per se,** may be better for many or most students, especially early in their careers, than courses rooted in the traditional divisions of knowledge. This is partly so, the argument runs, because the traditional disciplines tend to focus attention on themselves — that is, on the causes and effects (on "independent and dependent variables" as modern scientific jargon has it) that are the special province of the discipline at hand. In a department of sociology, one may study "the sociology of work"; one may not expect to study the psychology of work, or the economics of work — much less the philosophic implications of work, or any part of them. This is the well-known bind into which "hardening of the categories" at the traditional university forces students: they must study the world as cut up into pieces which suit the needs of those who do advanced research. These are not the pieces that best meet their own needs, which are to understand the world's complexity and its interconnections, and to put their knowledge to work in some useful endeavor.

The College for Human Services has grasped this nettle and has created a curriculum which potentially encompasses much that is usually included in humanities and social science courses at traditional colleges, but which begins with wholly different rubrics — the eight performance areas and the dimensions of performance. One may say, if one wishes, that the Systems Dimension includes a little of psychology, of sociology, of anthropology, of economics, and of political science. Indeed, reading materials for Systems classes tend to have been written by scholars who received their advanced training in those narrow fields, and who may still be teaching in departments with such names. But they are used at the College in classes where separating psychological from

sociological variables is not the major activity — where learning what systems are, and how they affect the performance area being studied, is the issue of concern.

This approach has the virtue suggested above of focusing attention where one wishes it to be. It also has another virtue: intellectual stimulation of the teacher of a kind unfamiliar since early college years. As Thomas Kuhn has noted, one of the great values of "normal science" in a well-developed field of inquiry is that it narrows and defines the questions for which answers are sought, so that one can tell clearly when one has an answer that will stand up under hard scrutiny, and when one doesn't. That makes scientific inquiry very different from the broad speculation which scientists of this century often scorn in the philosophy of earlier centuries. The science-like activities of modern humanistic scholars emphasize intensive, reliable scholarship involving ever-narrower issues and having the same objectives of rigor, depth and empirical defensibility as science. But such inquiry is not by any means the most stimulating or thought-provoking — or simply interesting — kind of inquiry that one can pursue. Inquiries which cut across fields, which raise for the teacher/scholar new questions which his or her own discipline doesn't ask or answer, can stimulate new insights and new lines of inquiry in a highly trained academic mind that years of "normal science" will not produce. Thus there is a strong case to be made for interdisciplinary organization of college-level studies simply because of the interest and the intellectual challenge which this can open up for the teachers involved. If they are well-educated and personally secure, it is likely to make them better teachers (and colleagues) than if they went ever deeper into their narrow specialities. They may also find their teaching more interesting. In the words of one experienced Coordinator-Teacher at the College:

> The faculty discussions of coming Crystals, when they work the way they are supposed to, are the most exciting part of the job. We ask someone to start by laying out the broad issues the Crystal should cover, and then the faculty revises and refines those in open discussion for a while, before we take specific assignments . . . Some new faculty find it hard to do this part. One couldn't get away from "first-year sociology" making up his syllabus. But we help each other along, making very specific suggestions about how syllabi might be changed. I find it very exciting . . .

As the quotation suggests, however, interdisciplinary work has it own problems. Some teachers, trained in specific ways, find it hard to go beyond their training and to ask new questions; others prefer to follow the standard "introduction to . . . "format which they learned as students. Time and training are required to help such teachers refocus their ideas, to become comfortable with new foci of thought, to find new ways of using the academic materials they are familiar with, and to search out (with colleagues' help) materials from other academic fields which will enrich their classes. Some teachers find that they do not like what this requires of them, and they leave the College after a time.

Moreover, interdisciplinary curricula are vulnerable to the charge of insufficient depth, of sacrificing the basic competence of a well trained scholar teaching in his own field for other values. This is an argument that can't be ignored or avoided indefinitely by the College. It is supported and reinforced by academicians trained in the traditional disciplines who run most universities and control scientific/scholarly panels created by government and foundations. Thus, the College must be able to show over the long pull that its academic program is of "high-quality" as judged by these experts — or find other criteria and other powerful constituencies that permit it to face down critics. So far, the College has followed both strategies simultaneously with some success. Among its major constituents are manpower officials and human service agency administrators who have only an indirect concern with "academic standards" as university professors think of them. Here, the old division between the campus thinkers and the real-world "doers" helps the College. Doers respect performance more than knowledge **per se.** At the same time reviews by academic screening bodies — accrediting agencies and academic observers brought in by the College itself — have given the College's program a substantial bill of good health.

The performance-based orientation of the College's curriculum carries different, but related values and problems. Performance-based curricula are no longer new or strange in higher education, although they were new when Audrey Cohen and her colleagues first devised this kind of curriculum more than a decade ago. The great strength of a performance orientation in education is its emphasis on ability to **do** as a guiding principle in determining what must be learned or taught. Thus, like the interdisciplinary

curriculum which makes academic teachers think anew about their fields, performance orientation poses new and more specific questions about the content of courses. It is not: "What should the well-educated person know?" or even: "What should one learn first about society?" The question is always: "What things must one be able to **do** to be a helper of others?" and "What must one know in order to do those things?" Professional education has always been about learning to **do**. Yet the vast majority of courses in almost every field have been directed at what must be known — and often the doing has been lost in the competition of specialties for time in the schedule.

**Interplay of Theory and Practice**

Another unique feature of the curriculum is its provision for the ongoing interplay of theoretical and practical issues, continuing throughout the program and culminating in an assessment process which emphasizes performance. The College takes a strong stand for the immediate integration of knowing and doing, using "constructive action" projects carried out by each student as the bridge between the two. Thus all students at the College are required during their entire period of study to work in a human service agency. Weekly Field Focus classes deal with impressions, problems and insights arising as students' work experience illuminates or raises questions about readings and lectures from the Dimension and Crystal classes. Similarly, faculty visits to students at their work-sites are expected to include discussion of ways in which classroom theory can help the students to understand and deal more effectively with work-problems -- from difficulties experienced with a client's low self-esteem to conflict with a work-supervisor. Finally, the Constructive Action method of assessment requires that students, in a written analysis, consider theoretical implications of their success or failure in helping their clients become empowered.

In these ways, and through intensive discussion in Dimension classes, the College urges its teachers and students to continually compare theory and practice in an ongoing, dynamic interplay that can have dramatic educational results. Students sometimes find that classroom theory can help them understand work problems — e.g., by seeing internal staff conflicts as examples of clashes of self-conceptions and role-expectations, or as problems in the legitimation of authority. Equally often, they find that no single concept or combination of concepts, can adequately explain for them the complexity of interactions in a very

"simple" incident at their worksite. With a Coordinator-Teacher's help, they may come to understand the partial role of all analytic explanations, and thereby gain a much more sophisticated knowledge of the relationship of theory to the realities it purports to illuminate. Some students are stimulated to their own insights — not yet recorded in any formal theoretical statement — about relationships in the human services, and so come to see themselves as unexpectedly able to make theoretical contributions in their own right.

This interplay between theoretical and practical questions needs to be distinguished from the giving of final, theoretical answers to students' questions. Many academic specialists are scornful of all "applied" theory in human affairs, because of the general inability of social scientists or humanistic scholars to approach the precision of the natural sciences in making empirically valid generalizations about causal connections among variables. If such reliable, causal statements cannot be made and validated, some argue, little can be said about the application of social theory to practical affairs that is not speculation masquerading as knowledge. To the discouragement of policy-makers, scholars and students alike, efforts to apply theory to concrete situations have been unsatisfactory. It turns out that very little is actually "explained" (in the rigorous sense used by scholars) by the research that has been done, starting with the questions dictated by theory and research procedure.

The College grasps this nettle. It admits the imperfection of all theoretical explanations that can be offered for complex sequences of human actions — but it offers students whatever theories have been found useful by practitioners in the past. It attempts to help them use, revise, and see the limitations of existing theories in a dynamic way, rather than as static and final explanations of events. Thus, when it works well, the College's method can result in students learning not just theories, but **how to theorize** — how to use ideas in connections and sequences that give them meaning, to form hypotheses worth checking, and to give greater clarity to otherwise puzzling aspects of human behavior.

In sum the curriculum of the College for Human Services, a college which can justly claim to be unique on so many counts, deserves careful study with a view to applying it in other fields and to a broader population of students.

## College for Human Services

Audrey C. Cohen
President and Founder

Alida Mesrop
Dean

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